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vented from enjoying a good night's rest by the number of other occupants. My cook prepared my meals at the little fireplace in the middle of the room. The villagers sat about and visited with us. When meal-time came the women and girls brought in their generous supplies of food, consisting of two large trays piled high with snow-white steaming rice, besides smaller trays and bowls filled with several kinds of curry, "ngape" water, and vegetables. The visitors were expected to eat something from every dish. While the meal was in progress the hosts withdrew, except one or two elders, the women returning afterwards to clear away the dishes and uneaten food with the polite remark that their guests had eaten very little. Many shared in receiving us; and we were spared the embarrassment, not to say the danger according to our belief, of violating the tabu that prevented our being entertained at the time by a family in their own quarters.

Besides serving as a guest-chamber, the "blaw" has another important use, namely, as the gathering-place for the young men of the village. When a boy becomes a youth ("hpo tha hkwa taw"), he is expected to spend his leisure time in his parents' room, working and eating with them, as seems to be the custom. When evening comes, he repairs to the "blaw" to be with his fellows and to sleep there. This is a custom that is common among the Kachins of Burma and many other tribes of the Orient. Among the Kachins the "blaw" is a place of license. The Brecs also allow a great deal of liberty to their young people, and evidently advantage of it is taken by them. But among the Sgaw Karens, at any rate, the girls remain with their mothers. There is no common room for the girls, or any place where both youths and maidens may meet for restrained intercourse. No doubt among the Karen the use of the "blaw" as a club-room is for the purpose of keeping the young men together and separating them from the young women, thus preventing offence of the "by na," which would bring a curse upon the soil and damage to the crops.

It has never been possible for parents to prevent all social intercourse between young people of the opposite sexes. In fact, it has hardly ever been attempted. As is shown elsewhere in this volume, there are occasions among the Karen when the sexes mingle, for example, on fishing expeditions and at marriages, funerals, etc. If, however, a youth desires to visit a maiden, etiquette prescribes the way: he must take his harp ("t'na"), appear before her house, and serenade her. Sitting down, he sings to the accom-

[i.e. Not being allowed in family rooms during the hpa tezat -- Analyst]

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585 tomary to sprinkle the bridal floor with rice to give the pair a fruitful married life. Possibly the showering of rice on newly married couples in the West had originally a similar significance. However, I have been told that in the olden times couples often refrained from living together for months or even a year or two after their marriage.

585 Many tabus were formerly observed by parties going to a wed-
784 ding. If they heard of a death, passed a funeral, or came into con-
787 tact with anything connected with a burial, the intermediary at once halted his companions and directed them to recall their "k'las." If a snake crossed their path, he stopped them and addressed the reptile: "You follow your path, and we will follow ours. Our way is short and pleasant. Yours is long and evil." If they happened to hear the call of the red-headed woodpecker, which is considered a bird of ill-omen, he would cry out: "You may be sick and die. It is nothing to us. Let the white ginger burn you." If they came upon a dead wild animal, the intermediary reminded the company that death, having taken its victim, would not touch them. Chancing to meet another wedding party, the two groups exchanged the greeting: "May you be free from all evil, and may you have peace." If either company had liquor with them, they all drank together.

Certain tabus made it necessary for the whole party to sit down where they were and wait until they believed the danger was past. They did this when they heard the call of the plover, the cry of the barking-deer, the "tauke te" of the lizard, or the scream of the woodpecker. When about to renew their journey after an interruption of this kind, they pretended to spit something out of their mouths, saying: "Let all evil remain on you." A sneeze would halt the entire retinue until the leader was assured that no more sneezes were to follow.

585 According to modern usage the groom is supposed to remain in
591 his wife's house three, seven, or any other number of days required by her parents. After the specified interval has elapsed, he is free to go about as he pleases; but he seldom returns to his own village, except for a brief visit. The general custom is for the husband to settle down with his parents-in-law, a practice that looks much like a survival from the matriarchal stage of the Karen's past.

586 Should the marriage prove unsatisfactory to the wife or her parents and they wish to sever the connection, they must purchase their release by paying the husband an ox or one hundred rupees.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

TABU

As among the Polynesians and South Sea Islanders, so also among the Karen people, certain foods, animals, persons, places, days, names, etc., are temporarily or permanently prohibited under penalty of a curse falling upon those who disregard the tabu. Among the Karen such prohibitions ("ta dü ta htu") are most commonly associated with marriage, adultery, births, widows and orphans, portents, signs of bad luck, crops, certain domestic animals, the "Bgha" feasts, the names of persons, high waters, and the gathering of herbs for dyestuffs. The people's fear of offending powerful spirits and thereby bringing calamity upon themselves, is at the root of most, if not all, of these tabus, which serve to illustrate the fact that primitive man does not recognize broad principles of conduct, but depends on precepts covering specific experiences in his life. When asked why they do not do the tabued acts, most Karens content themselves with the reply, "Ta t' ghe ba" (It is not good). The observance of these prohibitions, which are usually accompanied by certain sacrifices or offerings, is a matter of custom that has descended from former generations.

It is evident that most of the tabus are related to the domestic life and the occupations of the people. Only in a few instances are they concerned with interests distinctly tribal. It was formerly the custom among the Red Karen for the mothers of prospective chiefs of the tribe, and for the chiefs themselves, to abstain from the use of rice and liquor.[1] The tabu on the eating of rice by these persons is difficult to explain; but we know that the Red Karen use rice less extensively than the inhabitants of the plains, yams and other roots constituting an important part of their diet. The suggestion has been made that the tabu on liquor drinking by the chiefs and their mothers, was for the purpose of promoting the clearness of mind so desirable in the leaders of the tribe; but it is truer to say that they believe that by ascetic practices one may gain unusual powers—perhaps magical—either for oneself or, in the case of the chief, for his people. When the Red Karen chiefs ob-

[1] *Upper Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 308.

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served their tabus they prospered, but when they neglected them they suffered adversity, it is alleged.

Marriage of a Karen with a person of another race was formerly strictly forbidden. This exclusiveness kept the racial stock pure and unmixed. In recent times the prohibition has not been rigorously enforced. Hence, the barriers between the Karen on the one hand and the Burmese and Shan on the other have been somewhat weakened, betokening—it must be confessed—a moral looseness that was unknown before. The village elders have always maintained that marriages outside of the tribe ("taw leu hko") were not good, although such unions have not been lately tabued. Marriages between members of the same tribe or of the same village, providing the parties concerned are not more closely related than cousins, are permitted. To marry a relative closer than a cousin would be incest, and all the tribes forbid such unions. On the day of a wedding in a village the inhabitants are forbidden to labor.

Adultery and fornication are under strict tabu, except in the Red Karen tribe,[2] the belief among the other tribes being that these sins are offensive to the "Bgha" [3] and destroy the productiveness of the fields, the "Lords of the earth" withholding their favor from the crops when they find that such deeds have been committed. In making their annual feast to these deities, the Bwe tribe formerly required those who had been guilty of uncleanness during the year to confess their sins and did not permit them to come near the sacrificial altars.

A number of prohibitions are connected with birth. One of the Sgaw precepts forbids pregnant women to eat the flesh of the curious monkey-tiger *(Ictides ater)*, bitter herbs, and the long smooth pod called alligator's tongue. Before the men adopted the modern fashion of wearing their hair short, the husband of a woman who was with child was not permitted to trim his locks, for fear of shortening the life of his expected offspring. During the first six days following a birth the custom of the Paduang denies to the father the right of associating or even speaking with any one, except his own family. He alone cares for the mother and child during the period named.[4] The purpose of thus secluding the father is to prevent the transmission of the danger and weakness

[2] See Dr. Mason's account in the *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1866.

[3] This is true in those localities where the "Bgha" are regarded as the family penates. In other localities, as among the Bwe, the offended powers were the "lords of the earth."

[4] Lieutenant E. W. Carrick, *Report on Bwe Expedition*, 1894-95, p. 22.

[5] E. B. Cross, J. A. O. S. (1854) Vol. IV, 298, ff. and D. C. Gilmore, Journ. Burma

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of child-bearing to other members of the village. MacMahon states that the Bwe husband of a newly delivered mother complies with the custom of cutting fresh bamboo joints, in which he draws and heats the water for bathing the infant, over a fire kindled by himself in the open. He then carries the water to his wife's room up a new ladder, which he has made. After his wife has washed the child or he himself, in case she is too weak to do so, he hangs the bamboo joints under the house and leaves them there for six days before they may be used again.[5] On the day of the birth of a child, or even of a domestic animal, members of the village are forbidden to work. This is the tabu of births ("ta dū ta ble").

In the early times widows and orphans, as well as persons found to be holding improper relations, became tabu and were expelled from the village, in order to keep other inhabitants from falling under the vengeance of the evil-working demon, whose attention might be diverted from his first victims. The driving of these unfortunates into the jungle to live there by themselves, may be described as a kind of primitive quarantine.[6] Precaution of a different kind was at the bottom of the requirement that a visiting stranger should enter and leave the village-house by the same ladder. It was also required that the visitor must descend the ladder while facing inwards. Leaving the house by a different way from that by which one had entered, created suspicion of hostile intent among the inhabitants and might lead to hostilities. Like other neighboring peoples, the Karen observe a tabu in regard to women's garments, which must not come in contact with a man. Garments that are put out to dry must be hung away from the common paths in some inconspicuous place. Probably this custom originated in the fear that the supposed weakness of woman might be communicated to the men. For the same reason, evidently, the Brec tribe prohibits married men from taking part in making the coffin for a woman who has died in child-birth.

Tabus connected with portents, such as eclipses of the moon, earthquakes, the cries of apes, and certain strange sounds in the jungle, have a religious significance for the Karen and are accompanied by the prohibition of work for one or more days. The witnesses of these portents are seized with fear, drop their work, and stand about in helplessness. This, undoubtedly, is the normal behavior of primitive people under such circumstances. They as-

[5] MacMahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 218.
[6] See Chapter XIV on Social Conditions, pp. 128, 134.

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cribe the portent to some angry demon, who may at any moment impose a worse calamity upon them if they fail to observe this warning. The tabu of labor, until their fears have subsided, is clearly the precept that would suggest itself to people of deep-seated superstitions. According to Karen legend, the dogs that cause the eclipse of the moon by eating that luminary, are colder than water; while the one that swallows the sun, is hotter than fire. In order to prevent excessive heat or cold and the sickness and death that would follow, the people must abstain from work on the days when an eclipse occurs. The Karen name for the tabu of the eclipse is "ta dü ta yu mü ta yu la." [7]

The portent of the earthquake is produced by the mythical giant, "Hsi Ghu," when the beetle that feeds on the refuse of human beings, tries to deceive him into believing that the human race has disappeared from the earth. In his wrath the giant shifts the planet from one shoulder to the other, and the people shout to him in consternation: "We are still here. We are still here." When, in times past, the giant caught the beetle in this trick, he struck it in the face, and the beetle has had a flat nose ever since. At the time of an earthquake the people refrain from their work for a day, in order to help restore the equilibrum of the planet and to mollify "Hsi Ghu." This practice is called the tabu of the earthquake or "ta dü haw hko hu." [8]

When the apes howl it is a portent that the goddess "Ta La," who dwells on Mount "Thaw Thi," [9] one of the higher peaks of the mountain range separating the Toungoo district from Karenni, is uttering curses, which are greatly feared. In Shwegyin the people ascribe the falling of the leaves in the latter part of February to her imprecations and refrain from work for three days. They believe that if they failed to observe this "ta dü hpa taw" (the long tabu), their crops would be ruined.

The portent of strange sounds in the jungle betokens a combat between two celestial beings, one of whom, "Kwe De," hurls his spear at the other. The whizz of the weapon as it speeds through the air and its thud on striking the ground, evoke the cry, "Htaw law," from those who hear these startling sounds. They must stay at home that day, lest they should be in danger from these mythical spears.

[7] See Chapter VII, p. 54.
[8] See Chapter XXII, p. 250.
[9] See Chapter XXV, p. 262.

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784
777 A number of tabus are associated with signs of bad luck. Many of these signs are incidental to going on journeys. For example, if one sneezes on rising to start on a journey, or on the way hears the cry of a barking deer, or sees one of these animals or a snake crossing his path, or hears of somebody's death, or sees a civet-cat near his path, he must give up his excursion until another day. Otherwise, he will meet with an accident, fall sick, or experience some misfortune in his family. It was once the custom of those who were setting out on a trading journey to repeat the following words:

[539] "I am going to———— to trade.
O Snakes, do not cross my path.
O Barking-deer and Rabbits, do not hinder me.
I am going across my land and along my path.
There are many other paths on the earth.
O white Civet-cat, do not hinder me."

If divination shows that one's illness is due to having taken the wrong road on a recent journey, that road rests under a tabu for a period of from four to seven days. The branch of a tree is laid across the forbidden trail where it leaves the main path, and no one will enter it until the tabu is lifted. This is called the tabu of the road ("ta dü kleh"). When a death occurs in a village, the death tabu ("ta dü ta thi ta pgha") is observed until the burial ceremonies are over. Children and persons of weak constitution are kept from witnessing the removal of a corpse from the village, inasmuch as their "k'las" are said to be easily enticed away by that of the dead person. On an elephant hunt it is forbidden to mention the name of the beast, lest its spirit should hear and take alarm, thus destroying the chance of success in the chase. Instead it is called "ta hpa do" or "the great one." Other signs of ill luck surely bring their tabus. If one does not return from work on hearing the wildcat's cry, one will die. No one should live in a house whose owner dies, or by which a green pigeon flew while the house was building.

784
241 The observance of certain tabus are regarded as conducive to the production of good crops or of prosperity in other forms. When the people have made the offering, "theh a hku," they must refrain from going into their fields for seven days. Otherwise, the demons will follow them and spoil their crops. This tabu is known as "ta dü hkü ta dü theh." During the dark and the full of the moon, in February and July, respectively, when people say that "it is hot," meaning that conditions are unfavorable, they avoid work for

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the purpose of improving the conditions and keeping their crops from being ruined. Failure to observe this custom brings disappointment ("t' kle t htwa"), for one's labor will be worse than useless. On the plains, where they prepare a dirt threshing-floor after the Burman style, it used to be prohibited to drive a cart across it or to walk on it with shoes on. In other sections, where the threshing is done on a great mat, no one may step on it but the members of the family who take part in the work. The succulent shoots of vegetables, which are grown with the paddy, must not be cut with a sharp knife or other instrument, inasmuch as cutting would endanger the "k'la" or life principle of the paddy and scare away the demons that preside over the fields. Both the vegetables and their shoots, the latter being largely used for greens, must be plucked with the fingers. Another tabu prevents the eating of flesh during harvest-time. Any family who should transgress this precept would find, it is believed, that their supply of rice had vanished from the storage bin.

The following examples of tabus relating to domestic animals may be cited. If a sow or bitch has a litter composed only of females, they must all be killed. When less than three chicks are hatched from a nest of eggs, they must be killed. So also must the chick whose down dries fast to the feathers of the mother hen. A crowing hen is likewise doomed to death. These phenomena are supposed to be signs of weakness in the creatures concerned, for which some offended demon is responsible. Such weakness must not be allowed to spread.

Certain tabus contribute to preserve the integrity of the family through the female line. One of these prevents any outsider from entering a house where the family is celebrating the "Bgha" feasts. Indeed, a tabu debars from such gatherings the men who have married into the family, while those who are privileged to attend must remain in the house during the performance of the rites.

On the plains, where the Karen villagers build separate houses after the manner of the Burmans, persons are forbidden to drive their carts through the village road close enough to the houses to bump against the supporting posts. This tabu, which, in the eyes of a Westerner, partakes of the nature of a town ordinance, is enforced upon the offender by the imposing of a fine, namely, four annas in money or a fowl, payable to the heads of the household con-

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784 cerned. In the hills the money is put in a hole in the bamboo ladder
177 leading into the house or, in lieu of a money payment, the fowl is
342 hung under the house. Some persons, who have received the fine in the latter form, have shown a prejudice against eating it. I have been told that the British Government officials have upheld this tabu, when the collection of the fine has been resisted by the offending party.

784 Perhaps there is no more widespread tabu among the Karen
551 people than that of personal names.[10] I have known some individuals for years without knowing their names and have used the common expedient of calling them by the name of their eldest son. A man who served as our cook for years in the Baptist school at Tharrawaddy I knew only as "Ba Gyaw's father;" although I did finally discover his own personal name. For a boy to mention his father's name is almost equivalent, according to Karen ideas, to the son's wishing his parent's death; for the spirits, learning the latter's identity, might destroy him. Instead of speaking of his wife, a man will talk of the mother of his children, or of his oldest child whose name he may think it safe to mention. Not long ago a young man of good education, who was engaged in filling his blank application for a marriage certificate, was confronted with the fact that he was unable to give his mother's name. Not infrequently parents bestow opprobrious names on their children, in order to deceive the demons into thinking them too unworthy to be molested.

782 During the month of July, when the streams are in flood, the
787 people observe the tabu of the rising and falling of the waters ("ta
823 dū ta htaw ta law"). They refrain from labor, make an offering of a fowl all of one color on the path near a stream, and utter the following prayer: "O Lord of the great water and the small water, of the oceans and the lakes. We are offering you a large sweet fowl and sweet rice. Flow in your own banks as usual, so that we shall not be drowned or fall into the water to be devoured by crocodiles and dragons. Watch over us on our journeys, eat our offerings, and do not molest us." They then examine the fowl's bones and the gall-bladder of a pig, and, if the omens are favorable, they swim the stream three times. In case no mishap occurs, they believe that their offerings have been acceptable and that they will prosper. If the omens are not propitious the first time, they try

[10] See Chapter XVIII on Birth Customs and Childhood, p. 170.

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a second time and if necessary a third, in order to obtain a favorable response.

The Karen esteem the gall-bladder of a certain variety of fish as a valuable medicine, but assert that during the early days of August this medicinal organ becomes enlarged and "hot" (that is, flabby). They, therefore, consider it necessary to desist from work, in order to restore the gall-bladder to its normal condition and efficacy. During the other months this medicine is thought to be strong and useful in certain severe illnesses.

The time for gathering the herbs of which dyestuffs are made, is determined by divination. If, however, some one happens to pick them on a day found to be unfavorable, he becomes subject to a tabu, lest colds and coughs should spread throughout the village. To prevent this epidemic, the erring person must cut a sheaf of tall grass and set it up in the ashes of his fireplace, and when the other villagers come in they must spit on it. An elder then takes up the grass, saying: "May all coughs and colds be prevented. May we not catch them." Next, he leads the people out into a field, where he plies their heads and the stumps in the field with the sheaf until it is broken, meantime calling out: "Beat here. Beat there. Beat the tails of the demons and woodpeckers. Do not bring us illnesses, coughs, or colds." When he has finished, he leaves the frayed grass against a stump, and they all return to their houses. Finally, the elder asks in a loud voice: "Is every one well?" and they all shout back: "All are well." This is repeated three times, after which they all shut their doors and refrain from work during the rest of the day.

While all of these numerous tabus have helped to nourish the ancient superstitions of the Karen, it is well to remember that some of them, in the absence of other social and moral sanctions, have exercised a beneficial influence. Among the latter are the tabus against marriage outside of the tribe, and especially outside of the race. These tabus have been instrumental in maintaining the integrity of the various tribes and of the people as a whole, and in enabling the Karen to live largely apart from the corrupting influences of neighboring peoples. Other tabus have served to magnify the importance of the religious rites and to enforce a stricter morality than prevails among some primitive races. It is obvious that these benefits have been secured at a great economic cost, when one considers the large number of holidays which falls

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to the lot of the conscientious Karen. These holidays, however, have contributed in no small degree to sociability among the people, for they could spend them only in sitting at home in conversation and gossip with their friends over the hospitable betel-box. The rapid progress of the race in recent times has been accomplished by the breaking down of the validity of these tabus—a thing that is to be commended. Nevertheless, the civilizing agencies will have failed of performing an essential service, if they do not succeed in speedily creating a healthy public opinion and new social and religious sanctions in their place, in order to overcome the present tendency towards moral slackness.

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TWO KAREN CHRISTIAN PASTORS
The younger man (on the right) is the pastor and manager of the school shown above. The other is the son of the first convert in the Tharrawaddy District.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
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333. KARENS BRINGING ELEPHANTS TO MARKET.

"a spirit of equality, and governed by the moral influence of its natural heads alone." (Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, Vol. I., p. 407.) The chief of these elders is called *Sawbè*; he gives his name to the village. The faults of the Karéns are their dirt, their addiction to drink, and a degree of superstition so extreme that a motherless infant is refused adoption for fear of turning the wrath of a vengeful demon upon the foster-mother. In epidemics of cholera and small-pox the Karéns abandon their villages in panic fear. The Karéns are shorter but of stouter build than the Burmans and Talaings, and of much fairer complexion. But their name of "white" Karén is derived from their clothing. Very characteristic is their short upper arm. Young people of splendid physique may be seen; but the conditions of life are so hard, and malaria is so prevalent in the forests, that the population remains stationary—by the census of 1891, 633,600. The toilsome Karén finds lightness of heart in the liquor he brews, a remarkable contrast to the vivacious and abstinent Burman. The contrast is borne out in the dreary wail of the Karén music and the bright and exuberant cadences of the Burmese. Karén children grow independent very young (No. 355), and begin their heavy outdoor labour soon. Early physical exertion possibly accounts for the second moral quality noted above. The hill-cultivation is greatly at the mercy of the seasons, from burning-time in April to harvest in October. The hardship is aggravated by a superstition of divination-bones (*Kyeyyo*) which often tabooes the most eligible sites. Scarcely have the crops been garnered than the clearing of a fresh site for the village begins.

334. KARENS GOING OUT TO WORK.